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Companies decry plan, will lobby to keep cap

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Posted: Thursday, September 29, 2016 12:00 am | Updated: 4:58 am, Thu Sep 29, 2016.

By Christopher James christopher.james@baytownsun.com |  0 comments

A monumental announcement was made by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Wednesday that indicates their intentions to fully remove the San Jacinto River Waste Pits, which community members, local government and community activists celebrated. However, not everyone agrees with the proposal.

On Wednesday morning, the EPA announced the proposed plan to address contamination at the San Jacinto River Waste Pits Superfund site. After reviewing all available information, the EPA preferred removing a total of about 202,000 cubic yards of contaminated material from the northern and southern impoundments at a cost of nearly \$97 million.

The San Jacinto River Waste Pits is a Superfund site located near the I-10 bridge over the San Jacinto River between Highlands and Channelview. The pits were constructed in the 1960s for disposal of pulp and paper mill waste, which spans about 14-acres. In 2008, the site was placed on the National Priorities List when the pits were found to contain mercury, PCBs and cancer-causing dioxins.

Yet, a group known as San Jacinto Citizens Against Pollution and the responsible parties — International Paper and McGinnes Industrial Maintenance Corporation (MIMC) — don't believe full removal is the safest alternative.

"We strongly disagree with the proposed remedy put forth by the EPA. We are looking for the solution that best protects the environment and public health. We do not understand why the EPA would completely ignore their own consultant's report, prepared by the Army Corp of Engineers that concludes that removal of the wastes could significantly damage the environment and public health," MIMC said in a statement issued Wednesday. "It is disappointing that the EPA has apparently decided to ignore science and technical data. Excavation will result in re-suspension of the material, worsening the river and putting nearby communities at risk for years to come."

"The Army Corps report and subsequent EPA-required testing around the site make clear that retaining and fortifying the cap — making it even stronger and permanent — is the best way to protect the river and surrounding communities."

Last week, the responsible parties provided sample results that suggest the armored cap is containing toxic materials at the site.

In 2011, the responsible parties completed construction of the cap that served as a time critical removal action. The cap, which covers about 15 acres and consists of about 59,000 tons of stone with protective layers of geo-technical materials, is meant to stabilize the waste pits, prevent direct human contact and prevent contact with marine life.

The data, which was used by the EPA to support its remedial investigation and feasibility study, suggested the cap was working.



Today's E-Edition

"The sampling results demonstrate that no dioxin from waste is moving from the waste pits into groundwater below the pits or into surface water above the pits," MIMC stated. "We'll carefully review the EPA's proposed remedy and maintain our focus on ensuring that the ultimate remedy fully protects public health and the environment. Together with the potentially affected communities and other groups interested in protecting the environment, we will work to make sure that the ultimate remedy follows the best science and technical data to protect the environment and citizens of Texas."

International Paper and MIMC hoped the EPA to selected an alternative such as 3aN, which involves making additional enhancements to the armored cap to create a cap with increased long-term stability.

According to the Army Corps of Engineers, the additional cap enhancements added for this alternative include pre-stressed concrete or concrete filled steel pipe pilings placed 30 feet apart around the perimeter of the cap to protect from barge strikes. The spacing is designed to catch a typical barge, which is 35 feet wide. An additional armor stone cap with a thickness of at least 24 inches would be placed over the armor cap. The armor stone would have a median diameter of 15 inches. This additional armor stone would cover 13.4 acres of the 17.1 acre armored cap. Also, a course gravel filter layer would be placed on 1.5 acres of the Northwest Area where there is currently no geotextile under the armor cap.

The estimated cost of an enhanced cap is about \$24.8 million and construction would take about 15 months.

"We are deeply concerned that the EPA has selected the least safe remediation option for remediating the pits," said Thomas Knickerbocker, who is a member of San Jacinto Citizens Against Pollution. "Unbiased and objective scientific evidence from experts across the private and public sectors clearly spelled out the dangers of excavation ("dig and haul") remediation options while advocating for the safety and efficiency of a permanent cap solution."

According to Knickerbocker, the Army Corps of Engineers final assessment of the proposed remediation options fully demonstrates that a permanent cap solution is the best remediation alternative.

In a statement released Wednesday, Knickerbocker produced what the Army Corps of Engineers said about remediating the waste pits:

- A permanent, armored cap is the safest and fastest remediation alternative to reduce overall toxicity in the San Jacinto River, even if a barge strike or tropical storm occurred.
- The chances of toxins being reintroduced to the water while capped are "nonexistent," while other extraction (ex-situ) remedies, such as "dig-and-haul" or "dig-in-the-dry" would release over 1,000 times more toxins into the San Jacinto River
- Permanent armored caps have consistently and routinely maintained low toxin levels and protected human health and the environment at similar sites across the country.
- Excavation guarantees reintroduction of toxic waste into the San Jacinto River during the lengthy two-year excavation period, releasing 400,000 times more waste than a permanent cap
- Dioxin levels will increase in the river to pre-remediation levels in only a two-year excavation period, equal to that of 500 years of potential releases from a permanent cap. After two years of excavating, we'll see dioxin increase to the point when the site was leaking.
- Toxins will be released in the riverbeds and dramatically increase the toxicity levels of local fish.
- If there's a tropical storms or flood during the excavation period, there will be a devastating spread of toxins throughout the San Jacinto River and neighboring communities.

San Jacinto Citizens Against Pollution is a local organization of engaged citizens, environmentalists, and business owners concerned for the safety and welfare of our communities throughout East Harris County.

For more information about this group visit www.KeepItCapped.org.

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 29, 2016

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Superfund Site Solution



The EPA proposed a \$27 million plan Wednesday to remove 300,000 tons of waste from the San Jacinto River. The plan calls for the construction of a 200-foot wide, 10-foot deep trench around the pits. The trench will be filled with concrete and topped with a 24-inch armor stone cap. The plan also calls for the construction of a 10-foot wide, 10-foot deep trench around the pits. The trench will be filled with concrete and topped with a 24-inch armor stone cap.

EPA calls for removal of toxic pits

Coalition director says group's work not done

By [Name] [Photo]

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency announced its proposed remedy for the San Jacinto River Superfund site Wednesday. The plan calls for the construction of a 200-foot wide, 10-foot deep trench around the pits. The trench will be filled with concrete and topped with a 24-inch armor stone cap. The plan also calls for the construction of a 10-foot wide, 10-foot deep trench around the pits. The trench will be filled with concrete and topped with a 24-inch armor stone cap.

Companies decry plan, will lobby to keep cap

By [Name] [Photo]

International Paper and MIMC hoped the EPA to selected an alternative such as 3aN, which involves making additional enhancements to the armored cap to create a cap with increased long-term stability.

Judge voids oyster lease

By [Name] [Photo]

A federal judge voided a lease for oyster harvesting in the San Jacinto River. The judge found that the lease was illegal because it violated the Clean Water Act.

D.A. discusses struggles, successes

By [Name] [Photo]

The District Attorney discussed the struggles and successes of his office during a recent appearance. He highlighted the challenges of prosecuting complex cases and the importance of community support.

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Share with Us.
We'd love to hear eyewitness accounts, the history behind an article.

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